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The situation in the Middle East

Measures to eliminate international terrorism

Letter dated 18 April 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I wish to refer to the recent letters addressed to you by the Permanent Representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon dated 16 April 2001 (A/55/900-S/2001/362) and 17 April 2001 (A/55/902-S/2001/371), respectively. Israel completely rejects the unfounded allegations contained in those letters and their annexes and in this connection I would like to stress the following points.

1. On 24 May 2000, Israel completed the withdrawal of its forces from south Lebanon in full accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978). This withdrawal was confirmed by the Secretary-General (S/2000/590) and by the Security Council in resolutions 1310 (2000) and 1337 (2001) as well as by the statement of the President of the Security Council of 18 June 2000 (S/PRST/2000/21).

2. Despite Israel's full and confirmed compliance with resolution 425 (1978), the Lebanese Government continues to violate basic norms of international law and the provisions of resolutions 425 (1978), 426 (1978), 1310 (2000) and 1337 (2001), which calls for the restoration of international peace and security and the return of the effective authority and presence of the Government of Lebanon in the south. Indeed, Lebanon's continued failure to deploy its forces in the area, its disregard for the integrity of the Blue Line, its encouragement and support of the launching of provocative acts of terrorism and aggression from its territory, and its failure to control violent mobs congregating along the border represent a clear and genuine threat to peace and security in the region.

3. Since Israel's withdrawal, a number of grave acts of aggression have been perpetrated by terrorist organizations, chiefly Hizbullah, in clear violation of the Blue Line. These acts include the abduction on 7 October 2000 of three Israeli soldiers who were on patrol on the Israeli side of the Blue Line and several cross-border attacks which have claimed the lives of three Israeli soldiers. In this connection, I would like to refer to my previous letters dated 16 February 2001

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(A/55/792-S/2001/142), 6 February 2001 (A/55/767-S/2001/111), 26 November 2000 (S/2000/1121), 23 October 2000 (S/2000/1011), 19 October 2000 (S/2000/1002) and 7 October 2000 (S/2000/969).

In the most recent attack, referred to in my letter dated 16 April 2001 (S/2001/367), Hizbullah gunmen fired two Sagger anti-tank missiles at an IDF tank, killing an Israeli soldier. Following a meeting with the Prime Minister of Lebanon on 14 April 2001, the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for southern Lebanon made the following comment: "The incident as you know took place in a form and a place which is an infringement, a clear infringement of resolution 425 (1978). The Blue Line as far as the United Nations is concerned is there and has been trespassed in a violent way."

4. The territory referred to as Shab'a farms, which the Government of Lebanon now claims as Lebanese territory, was confirmed by the Security Council not to be on the Lebanese side of the Blue Line. The reasons for this are clearly set out in the report of the Secretary-General dated 22 May 2000 (S/2000/460), a report which was subsequently endorsed by the Security Council on 18 June 2000 (S/PRST/2000/21).

It is important, as well, to note that at the time of the Israeli withdrawal, the Government of Lebanon stated that it would respect the line as identified by the United Nations (see paragraph 5 of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2001/66) dated 22 January 2001 and the statement by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/2000/21) dated 18 June 2000). In November 2000, Lebanon reversed its position, claiming the right to use force against Israeli troops in the area. This position is clearly incompatible with resolution 425 (1978) and subsequent Security Council resolutions, as well as with established principles of international law.

5. It is a well-known fact that Syria exercises an overwhelming degree of control in Lebanon. With 35,000 troops stationed there, and occupying a significant portion of Lebanese territory, Syria is the main power broker in Lebanon. The Syrian Government's support of Hizbullah, and its permitting of overland arms transfers from Iran to Hizbullah through Syrian territory, have directly enhanced the capability of the organization to launch deadly attacks against Israel. Syria also allows Hizbullah to maintain terrorist training facilities in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley and supports and encourages the organization's terrorist campaign against Israel as a means of achieving Syrian political objectives. Consequently, Syria, in addition to the Government of Lebanon, also bears direct responsibility for violations emanating from Lebanese territory.

6. Despite the continued and flagrant violations of Security Council resolutions and international law by the Governments of Lebanon and Syria, and the ongoing and violent provocations directed at Israeli soldiers and civilians which emanate from Lebanese territory, Israel has exercised a great deal of restraint. In the face of violent aggression, and the murder and kidnapping of our soldiers, Israel's response has been cautious and measured.

7. Following the most recent act of aggression perpetrated by Hizbullah on 14 April 2001, in which an Israeli soldier was killed and to which I referred in my letter dated 16 April 2001 (S/2001/367), Israel was compelled to respond. In the light of the above, Israel exercised its legitimate right to self-defence in an operation

on 16 April 2001 aimed at preventing the recurrence of such armed aggression from Lebanese soil.

Israel does not seek an escalation of violence on its northern border. On the contrary, we wish to see, and we will act resolutely to bring about, the return of international peace and security. In this connection, I should like to recall that, in his report of 31 October 2000 (S/2000/1049), the Secretary-General observed that the time has come to establish the state of affairs envisaged by resolution 425 (1978). That would require "first and foremost, that the Government of Lebanon take effective control of the whole area vacated by Israel last spring and assume its full international responsibilities, including putting an end to the dangerous provocations that have continued on the Blue Line".

Israel therefore calls once again upon the Governments of Lebanon and Syria to heed the call of the international community and comply fully with their obligations under the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the principles of international law. We further call upon those Governments to proceed with the deployment of the Lebanese armed forces up to the Blue Line, to ensure the return of the effective authority of the Government of Lebanon in the area, and to prevent the activities of terrorist elements operating in the territory under their control so as to ensure the restoration of international peace and security. These long-overdue actions will serve to ensure stability along the northern border while demonstrating that the commitment to peace and security in the Middle East, expressed in the letter of the Lebanese Representative, is more than mere rhetoric.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of this letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 40 and 164, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Yehuda **Lancry**
Permanent Representative